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From RUSSELL H. RENZ

March 17 19 39

The American Numismatic Society -
Compliments of the author,
R. H. Perry M.D.
3/6/39.

A Treatise Compiled From Papers
read before the
DETROIT COIN CLUB.

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Russell H. Renz, M. D.

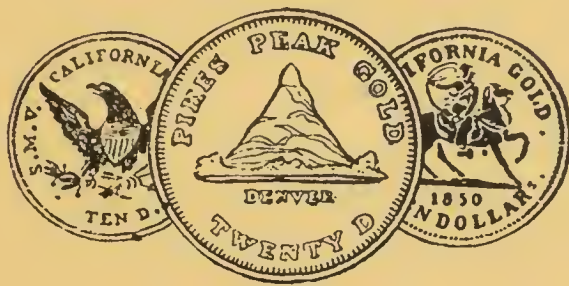
References:

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Edgar H. Adams
Clarence Griffin
"The Numismatist"

Printed by D. R. Heath
Detroit

PRIVATE GOLD COINAGE of the UNITED STATES



A treatise on the subject of "Private and Territorial Gold Coins of the United States," including the first important issues of the Bechtlers and the later California coinage from the various private mints of that State



RUSSELL H. RENZ, M. D.



INTRODUCTION



I have always considered the subject of "Private Gold Coinage of the United States" a most fascinating and interesting one. As a young lad attending High School, it became my good fortune one day, to acquire one of the octagon gold dollars and as I look back upon the years, I can now realize how concerned I was over the possession of this one small item; for as the years rolled by I obtained more and more specimens, among them, my first fifty dollar octagon slug, and what a thrill that was!

I will never cease to forget my first impression of this huge, cumbersome appearing coin, badly scratched, dented and in every manner of sign possible, the appearance of this coin was indicative of one series of hard knocks after another. However, to me, it was nevertheless, a wonderful piece, for in my mind, it represented something more than just a coin. Knowing the hardships and extreme suffering the pioneers of 1849 had endured, this one battered coin seemed to have a purpose to fulfil, a reminder to our generation that it was symbolic of the hard knocks the pioneer, himself, had endured.

Being an ardent student of this series of coinage and having made it my specialty in the numismatic field, I presume that it is more or less natural that I should manifest a desire to impart whatever knowledge I have on the subject to others, especially to the student, or to those interested in this subject,

Russell H. Renz, M. D.

A. N. A.
Detroit Coin Club.
1938.

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PRIVATE GOLD COINAGE of the UNITED STATES

Having written some papers on the subject of private gold coinage of the United States, it has been a pleasure and a pastime for me to compile these papers and prepare a treatise on the matter. I have of course, no desire to elaborate but to relate as briefly as possible this most interesting phase of numismatics. The real begining of private issues by Templeton Reid of Georgia in 1830 and the Bechtler's of North Carolina in 1831, and most important of all, the subsequent issues of private coinage in California from 1849 to 1855 inclusive, undoubtedly establishes a most attractive series of coinage.

It was in California that the greatest variety and number of these coins were struck, due, no doubt to the enormous amount of metal produced. At no period in the history of our nation do we find a more picturesque, historical or romantic background than the California of 1849. The great achievement of these hardy and courageous pioneers who blazed the trail against all odds to open up a vast new country is really an inheritance and a most splendid example for every true American.

Thru the medium of present day scenario and fiction writers the the picture and story of the pioneer is vividly brought to us. We may still see the covered wagon, stage coach and pony express. We may still witness the hardships these people endured, the misfortunes, the brighter side; sudden wealth, love, romance, and the fascination of it all. While we do not see these things in reality, we do however, as numismatists, preserve that which is real and appropriately emblematic of the pioneer. I refer, of course, to the private issues of gold which are so scarce today and cherished so much by the numismatist.

In my attempt to discuss territorial and private issues of gold in the United States, I wish to state that with the exception of Ephriam Brasher, a New York jeweler, who in the year of 1787 coined the Brasher doubloon, the coinage of these private issues began in this country not much earlier than the year 1831. The mines of North Carolina and Georgia were at that time the largest producers of gold in this country, and it was in North Carolina that these first important private issues of gold were coined.

As stated above, there are many types of Bechtler coins, far too many for me to describe in a monograph of this nature. Of the one dollar denomination there are three distinct types or series, consisting of, approximately, fifteen different die varieties. The three distinct types are stamped 27 G., 28 G., and 30 G., indicating of course, 27 grains, 28 grains, and 30 grains.

The 30 grain dollar is probably the first type struck by Christopher Bechtler and is considered a rare variety. Obverse, 30 G. in the field, the name C. Bechtler and Rutherf. Reverse, N. Carolina Gold and the word Dollar, the word ONE in center of field. The 28 grain dollar was also coined by C. Bechtler and on the obverse of this coin we find the name Bechtler and Rutherf., 28 G. in the field with a star before the numeral 2. Reverse, ONE in the field with the letter N in the word ONE inverted and a star after the letter E. The 27 grain dollar was issued by A. Bechtler and this particular type appears to be quite common, probably due to greater issue. Obverse, A. Bechtler and Dol., large numeral 1. in center of field. Reverse, the inscription, Carolina Gold. 27 G. in field and 21 C. below.

There are about five varieties of the \$2.50 denomination but the undated specimens and those bearing the word Assayer are considered to be the rarest. It appears that all the known varieties of this particular value were struck by C. Bechtler. They are stamped 64 G., 67 G., 70 G., and 75 G.

Of the five dollar value, there are, approximately, ten different varieties, all of which are rare. Those struck by C. Bechtler are stamped 128 G., 134 G., 140 G., and 150 G. Coins of the \$5.00 denomination were also struck by A. Bechtler, these being stamped 128 G., 134 G., and 141 G. Like the \$2.50 denomination, those bearing the word Assayer and the undated variety are considered extremely rare.

Inasmuch as vast quantities of Bechtler coins were struck, it may seem very strange that these coins are so rare today. With the establishment of a mint at Charlotte in 1837, many individuals with quantities of Bechtler coins had them minted into U. S. coins. With the establishing of a banking system in North Carolina, all Bechtler coinage passing through these institutions found their way to the nearest mint to be eventually re-coined. Between 1850 and 1860 thousands of people of North Carolina and Tennessee emigrated westward,

with them went much of the Bechtler coinage.

Going back to the Bechtlers, I might add that, true to his trust, the senior Bechtler had established a reputation for honesty and fair dealing. His maxim was that honesty was the best policy. It has been said that country people came to him with their rough gold, and that all transactions were conducted as simply as those at the grist mill where the miller deducts the toll for the grist he has manufactured. After the death of C. Bechtler, in 1842, the son, Augustus, continued minting operations as well as a jewelery and gunsmith business. He remained in the coinage business about one year, however, being succeeded by his cousin, Christopher Bechtler, Jr. Augustus had also established an honorable reputation, and continued in the jewelry business until the time of his death in 1846.

Christopher Bechtler, Jr., was also an experienced metal worker, but it has been stated that he did not possess the conscientious scruples of his uncle and cousin. That he did not adhere to the same high standards of his uncle appears evident from a report to the President of the United States, made by R. M. Patterson, Director of the U. S. Mint, in which he stated that frequent assays made of C. Bechtler, Jr., coinage showed these pieces to be below the nominal value marked upon them. This, of course, made it more advantageous for the miner to take his gold to the private coiner rather than to the United States mint. Christopher Bechtler moved to Spartansburg in 1850, and so ended Bechtler coinage. I made no mention of Charles Bechtler or his activities, as it appears he died shortly after coming to this country.

The Bechtlers, especially Christopher, Sr., and Augustus, had contributed a great deal to the economic life of North Carolina. There existed at the time, an urgent demand for gold coinage, and the Bechtlers satisfied that demand in a very conscientious manner. That these men, apparently, died in poverty should be further evidence of their integrity and honesty. The Bechtler home stood on the present Rutherfordton-Marion Highway, about four miles north of Rutherfordton. It was here that the elder Bechtler did his work as a mintmaster. During the years that the Bechtlers operated this mint, there were no regulations or Federal laws against the minting of gold or silver, but the coining of copper by individuals or private concerns was prohibited. From 1831 to 1840 it is estimated that the

Bechtlers coined nearly two and a quarter million dollar's worth of gold.

Bechtler coins were accepted without question in North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia. At the beginning of the Civil War, the Confederacy issued currency, but no gold to guarantee, and as a result Bechtler coins in the South were carefully hoarded. Many contracts of the sixties specified Bechtler coins rather than Confederate currency as a consideration. Bechtler coins were not pieces of beautiful workmanship, but, on the contrary, were more or less crude in appearance and design; they bore no device which was in any way emblematic of a national character. Many of the Bechtler coins we see appear to be bent or dented, probably the result of having been struck from defective dies. In regard to the purity of Bechtler coins, no official guarantee was ever given by the United States, altho an investigation was made of the Bechtler mint in 1834 by the Government. Finding the Bechtler coins were of a higher standard than the regular issues, and realizing the necessity of such a coinage, no action was taken against the coiners.

The Bechtlers not only coined money but manufactured all sorts of jewelry, watch chains, brooches, cuff links and trinkets. In many cases collectors have paid large sums to obtain these articles. As stated before, the Bechtlers were also gunsmiths, and it has been said that in 1832 they invented a device to fire a rifle at the rate of ten shots per minute. Not many of these were manufactured, however, but the limited number produced were quickly purchased by those who desired the latest in firearms.

Inasmuch as the Bechtlers were the first private coiners of real consequence in this country, their minting operations, subsequently, proved a most important step in our future monetary situation. Being the first to strike private issues, they really set a precedent for similar concerns of California at a later date.



CALIFORNIA GOLD

While Bechtler coins were the first private issues of real consequence in this country, I wish to emphasize the fact that the discovery of gold in California and the subsequent coinage of California private issues constitute a more important chapter on this subject. Gold had been discovered in the mountain regions of southern California prior to 1848, but it was not until January 1848, that John Marshall, a native of New Jersey, made the discovery of gold at a site now known as Coloma, in El Dorado County.

It appears that Mr. Marshall was an experienced timberman, possessing a keen knowledge of milling operations, entered into a partnership with a Captain John Sutter, a Swiss by birth, but a naturalized Mexican citizen, to build a saw mill on the south fork of the American River. John Sutter, a wealthy man, was to furnish the capital and John Marshall was to be given a one quarter interest to operate the mill, and as his compensation, receive one quarter of all timber produced.

Work on this mill began in the summer of 1847, but John Marshall, like many others engaged in new building enterprises, experienced certain difficulties in connection with his work. It was at such a time during the construction of the mill, that he, in company with a Peter Wimmer, a neighbor and friend, decided to carefully inspect the work and determine the progress being made. This was on a morning early in January 1848. It was during the course of their inspection that both men noticed on a muddy rock, a substance resembling gold. Altho Mr. Marshall was the first to examine the discovery, he doubted that it was in reality gold that he had found. Mr. Wimmer, however, being a native of Georgia, and being quite familiar with gold mining, soon tested and determined that the substance was gold beyond all question of doubt.

News of this discovery, and the enormous influx of population and the abundant production of gold had a far reaching effect not alone in California, but throughout the whole of the United States. Paralell to the situation in North Carolina and Georgia, nuggets of gold and gold dust necessarily became a medium of exchange, resulting in much inconvenience to the miners and population in general.

Much needed merchandise was accumulating in the Customs House for the need of real U. S. currency with which to pay duties and release goods to the merchants. The government refused to accept gold dust and nuggets with the result that a great many people hoarded regular coinage as an emergency measure for their own needs, creating, of course, a scarcity of real money in the regular channels of trade. When this condition first became evident, coins of many nationalities began to reach California.

Spanish, Mexican, and certain South American dollars were nearly all of higher value and rated above par but to those were added large quantities of inferior coins, especially the French five franc pieces, which had an intrinsic value of about ninety-three cents but passed in regular trade the same as those coins having the intrinsic value of our dollar. In place of a fractional currency, many varieties of minor silver coins went into circulation, and invariably these were accepted by merchants without question.

Many of these minor silver coins had an intrinsic value of less than twenty cents, but, inasmuch as they were approximately the size of our quarter dollar, and because it was almost impossible to make a purchase of less than twenty five cents, these pieces were passed without difficulty. This situation soon led to an evil form of speculation, most of these speculators reaping a rich harvest for themselves.

While it is true that some silver coins of a higher standard were accepted at the Customs House in payment of duties, nevertheless, it is also true that the merchant in most cases was obliged to pay a premium in gold dust in order to secure this necessary silver with which to complete his transaction. In some cases, and under certain circumstances, gold was a despised metal. The Chinese, for instance, actually specified payment in silver from the San Francisco merchants to whom they sold goods.

The need for regular coinage became so imperative that it was only a matter of approximately six months following Marshall's discovery of gold in California, that many of the influential citizens of San Francisco took it upon themselves to seek some form of relief for the holders of gold dust. Governor Mason was requested to use all the influence at his command to correct conditions as they then existed, and in response to this plea, he at once instructed that gold dust should be accepted by the Collector at its then intrinsic value of \$16.00 per ounce.

He was soon advised however, that his act was a violation of the U. S. law which provided that Customs duties were payable in coin only, consequently he revoked the order but permitted merchants to deposit their dust at the Customs House at the rate of \$10.00 per ounce, with the provision that they could redeem it within sixty days with the necessary coin, otherwise see their dust sold at auction. As it was almost impossible to obtain the prescribed money, merchants were obliged to stand helplessly by and see their gold which was worth more than \$18.00 an ounce at the Philadelphia mint; sold at from \$6.00 to \$8.00 an ounce to the highest bidder. Most of this gold was bought by speculators, who, in some manner were able to obtain the necessary coin.

In July 1848, San Francisco merchants met to seek means of protecting themselves against further losses. There was much discussion concerning a private coinage as the right of private individuals to issue gold coins had never been seriously questioned. As a precedent it was argued that the Bechtlers had been doing business long after the establishment of the U. S. Branch Mint at Charlotte, N. C. As the supply of coinage became more limited and the need more imperative, it was suggested that private assayers issue gold pieces of various denominations as a real necessity measure. On July 27, 1848, a number of influential citizens of San Francisco outlined to Governor Mason the need of private coinage and requested him to sanction such issues.

On the following day, July 28, 1848, Governor Mason did acknowledge the receipt of this communication. He stated that under the circumstances, so well known to him, that he would not hesitate in saying that if the California gold which existed in such abundant quantities could be wrought into convenient shapes to resemble regular coinage, he would allow it to be accepted by the Collector of Customs at its intrinsic value, in payment of duties. The Governor, however, revoked his permission for a private coinage on August 8, 1848, explaining that his act conflicted with an Act of Congress, approved August 6, 1846.

The issuing of private coinage had already begun, however, and while no legal authority had been granted, the need for a real medium of exchange was so acute that no attempt was made to prosecute the coiners. Inasmuch as no action was ever taken against the Bechtlers or Templeton Reid, it was probably assumed by those engaged in the business of coinage, that they were, to a certain ex-

tent, acting within their rights.

Early in 1849 these private issues began to appear in circulation. It has been stated, that probably the first of these were the five dollar issues of Norris, Gregg & Norris, struck at Benicia City, though the imprint is San Francisco. Rectangular ingots of gold were struck by Moffat & Co., who were doing business in San Francisco in the summer of 1849. In July of 1849, a circular coin of ten dollar denomination bearing their stamp appeared, the first of this type to be struck in California.

During the latter part of 1849, a great many issues were placed in circulation as certain companies in the East came to California bringing their own machinery for coining. Many of these pieces resembled regular U. S. coinage while others bore original emblems and devices. Along with the California issues, it is interesting to note that Mormon coins from Utah made their appearance in general circulation at about this time. These were known as "Great Salt Lake City Pure Gold" coins, however, it did not take long to reveal that the net value of these pieces were considerably below par, consequently these first fell into disrepute and were eventually refused in regular channels of trade.

The next to make their appearance from a neighboring territory were the five and ten dollar denominations of the Oregon Exchange Company. These were the so-called "Beaver Coins" and due to their historical background constitute a very interesting series. The dies for these issues were engraved by Hamilton Campbell, a Methodist missionary who had come to Oregon by ship around Cape Horn. The machinery for coining was built by Thomas Powell, a blacksmith from Salem, Oregon. It has been said that he used scraps of iron and the tires off of wheels that had crossed the plains, in an effort to obtain enough iron with which to construct the equipment for rolling and stamping coins. He was allowed one dollar per pound for all iron used in his work. For men so little experienced in the art of coining gold, it must be said that their work was a distinct credit to them. These coins were of excellent quality compared with other private issues, and unlike the Mormon coins, were accepted at par.

The Miners' Bank Tens were intrinsically worth \$9.87; the Half Eagle of Norris, Gregg & Norris about \$4.90; the Ormsby Tens, \$9.37; the Ten and Twenty-five Dollar pieces of Templeton Reid, \$9.75 and \$24.50 respectively; the Cincinnati Mining & Trading Company's Five

and Ten Dollar coins were worth \$4.95 and \$9.70; the Pacific Company's issues, \$4.48 and \$7.86; the Moffat Ten Dollar coins were worth \$9.777. With these coins, the early Californians were compelled to do business but it so transpired that most of this coinage soon fell into disrepute, once the spuriousness of certain issues was revealed. The Mormon coins were the first to come into disfavor and were positively refused in trade. The Miners' Bank pieces were accepted at a twenty per cent discount, and these, along with the Mormon coins were soon driven from circulation.

Most of the other firms began to disappear in 1850 until Moffat & Company, alone, remained the sole survivor of those hectic days of California gold coinage of 1849. However, two new concerns, Baldwin & Company, and Dubosq & Company made their appearance in 1850. To correct many of the evils associated with early California currency, it was proposed that there be established a State Assay Office of gold. Although the creation of this office had been contemplated as early as 1848, it was not until April 20, 1850, that a bill passed by the California Legislature, creating the office of State Assayer, became a law. About eight days prior to the passage of of this bill while Legislature was in session, a petition was addressed to Governor Peter Burnett by prominent citizens of San Francisco, requesting that Frederick D. Kohler be appointed State Assayer. Upon the enactment of this Act, this request was granted.

Mr. Kohler, a jeweler of New York City, joined the gold rush in 1849, and had, for a short time, conducted a private gold assaying establishment in San Francisco in partnership with David C. Broderick, who later became a U. S. senator. While it is not definitely known, it is supposed that this concern had coined the ten dollar gold pieces bearing the imprint of the Pacific Company, dated 1849. Mr. Kohler, however, after his appointment to the office of State Assayer, sold out his private assaying interest to Baldwin & Co.

The issues of the State Assayer were square and also rectangular ingots or bars; which had first been cast and then finished with a hammer. The law specified that upon these there must be stamped the true value in dollars and cents, the correct weight and carat fineness in accordance with the U. S. Mint standard, also the letters "Cal," the date, the Assayer's initials over the words "State Assay-

er," and upon each end and side of ingot so issued, some uniform stamp or impression.

These ingots or bars, ranged in value from \$36.55 to \$150.00, and probably on account of their crude appearance, were commonly called "slugs." While it is a certainty that a large quantity of these pieces were issued, it nevertheless, is a fact that Kohler ingots, today, are excessively rare for there are only about four known specimens. These, of course, are in famous collections; the denominations of the four specimens being \$36.55, \$40.07, \$45.34 and \$50.00. For one who specializes in Territorial Gold, it would, undoubtedly, be an excellent idea to erase from the mind any thought of obtaining a specimen, but rather live in the expectation of just seeing one.

Probably most interesting to the numismatist is the fact that the State Assay Office was the only one of the kind to operate under the authority of a state. Furthermore, it would appear that in authorizing such issues, that California had violated a clause of the United States Consitution which made it unlawful for any state to issue currency. It is also interesting to note that the issues of this office were the first to be known as "slugs," which title was subsequently applied to the \$50.00 octagon gold pieces of the U. S. Assay Office. The State Assay Office had been functioning less than one year when it was abolished, due to the fact that the United States Assay Office began operating February 1, 1851.

The United States establishment for assaying and coining gold was the direct result of an appeal to Congress in 1850 by representatives of California who employed every means at their command to convince much opposition that a branch mint in California should be authorized. When it became evident that a bill to this effect would fail to pass at that particular session, a compromise was made with the California delegation, whereby it was agreed to, as a temporary measure, to create the United States Assay Office in the city of San Francisco. The Secretary of the Treasury was instructed to make a contract with a reliable assaying firm in California to receive gold for assaying, smelting and forging same into ingots and bars upon which should be stamped the value and fineness of each ingot. The contract was received by Moffat & Co., while Augustus Humbert, a watch-case maker of New York City, was appointed U. S. Assayer, and whose duty it was to supervise the work and place the Government stamp on all ingots and bars produced.

In discussing the U. S. Assay Office, it is important to relate at the same time, the history of Moffat & Co. Mr. John L. Moffat, a New York assayer, arrived in California during the early days of the gold rush and it was only a few months after his arrival that he was in a partnership with Messrs. Joseph R. Curtis, P. H. W. Perry and Samuel Ward and had formed a smelting and assaying firm. As already mentioned; this firm first issued rectangular ingots upon which was stamped the name, Moffat & Co., the weight, fineness of metal and the value in dollars and cents. The denomination of these ingots varied from \$9.43 to \$264.00 altho it appears that the two known varieties to exist at the present time are those of \$9.43 and \$16.00 respectively.

It was in July 1849 that the firm of Moffat & Co. employed Mr. Albert Kuner, a Bavarian, who had come to this country as an expert cameo cutter but proved himself to be an able die cutter as well. To Mr. Kuner was given the work of cutting the dies for the first ten dollar gold piece issued by this concern. The design of this particular issue closely resembled that of the regular U. S. coinage except that the name of "Moffat & Co." appeared on the coronet of Liberty instead of the word "Liberty," and instead of the legend "United States of America" on the reverse, there appeared "S. M. V." (Standard Mint Value) California Gold," and at the bottom, the denomination, "Ten D."

The stamp "S. M. V." indicated value equivalent to that of the regular U. S. issues, however, it appears that according to assayers at the Philadelphia mint most of the Moffat coins of 1849 were in quality, inferior to those of the government mint. An assay by government assayers of a mixed lot of Moffat ten dollar gold pieces dated 1849 showed an average value of \$9.977 per coin.

However, the coins of Moffat & Co. were extremely popular and enjoyed, at least, the public confidence and although they did vary to the extent that their value was often less than the amount stamped upon their face, it must also be remembered that their value sometimes exceeded the prescribed amount so that it was generally believed that any discrepancies were due to faulty facilities of coining rather than premeditation on the part of the coiners. Inasmuch as the ten dollar denomination met with such spontaneous approval; it was also decided by this firm to issue a \$5.00 piece. The design of this coin was similar to that of the larger denomination and the dies were also made by Mr. Kuner. In 1850, Moffat & Co. struck five dollar pieces

entirely and these were issued in large quantities which fact is evident by the comparative ease with which one is able to purchase these coins even at the present time.

Although many of the private mints were compelled to discontinue business by 1850, it appears that Moffat & Co. acquired more and more prestige and public confidence. Their issues of 1850 were of such good quality that they were quoted at par in market reports while most other private coinage was quoted at eight per cent discount. The fine reputation acquired by this firm was further enhanced by the fact that they never refused to redeem their own coins at their own counters in silver whenever requested. Silver coins were accepted for customs dues consequently were on a par with legal gold coins and commanded a premium in gold dust. With a growing reputation for honesty and fair dealing resulting in a contract from the U. S. Government, it can be readily understood that Moffat & Co. advanced from a private organization to a semi-official mint.

Upon securing the Government contract, Moffat & Co. immediately discontinued private coinage but made preparation for the expansion of their plant to facilitate their work for the Government. Having obtained a new and larger site with greater accommodations, the following advertisement appeared in "Daily Alta California" on January 29, 1851:

"United States Assay Office — We give notice that on or about the first of February ensuing, we will be prepared to receive gold dust for smelting and assaying, forming same into ingots and bars, in accordance with our recent contract with the Secretary of the Treasury, authorized by Act of Congress, approved Sept. 30, 1850, under the supervision of the United States Assayer, Augustus Humbert, Esq., who will cause the United States stamp to be affixed to same.

Moffat & Co.

Due notice will be given of the removal of the United States Assayer's Office to Montgomery St."

Augustus Humbert arrived in San Francisco on either January 30 or 31, and it is assumed that the first octagonal fifty dollar gold piece bearing his name and stamp was struck on one of these two days, for the "Pacific News" of San Francisco, dated February 1, 1851, states that the first coin produced under authority of this office was

shown to us yesterday. It is also assumed that Augustus Humbert had his stamp made in New York City, and that the dies were engraved by C. C. Wright as this name appears on certain known pattern pieces in copper. Mr Humbert, of course, was not expected to strike coins but merely to affix his stamp as a means of certification of all ingots produced by the Assay Office. The engine-turned design on the reverse of these pieces is attributed to the fact that Mr. Humbert had been a watchcase maker, and as an after thought, embellished the reverse of the coins with this design to improve its general appearance.

The regular production of these issues appears to have begun about February 14, 1851, and strange as it may seem, there is every indication to believe that denominations of \$100.00, \$200.00, \$500.00 and \$1000.00 were even contemplated. A rather comprehensive account of these coins was given in an article in the "San Francisco Prices Current," together with illustrations, during the month of February 1851. The article states:

"The above cut represents the obverse of the United States ingot, or rather, coin, of the value of \$50.00 about to be issued at the Government Assay Office. It is precisely of this size and shape. The larger ones of one and two hundred dollars are exactly similar, except they are proportionately thicker. The reverse side bears an impression of rayed work, without any inscription. Upon the edge is the following:— 'Augustus Humbert United States Assayer - California Gold 1851.' Those of five hundred and one thousand dollars are in the form of parallelograms about five inches in length and one and three quarters inches in breadth, and ranging in thickness - the smaller being three tenths of an inch and the larger, six tenths."

The "Daily Alta California" of February 21, 1851 had the following editorial comment to make upon the new fifty dollar piece:—

"The new fifty dollar gold piece, manufactured under the Act of Congress, appointing a United States Assay Office in California, and made under the supervision of the United States Assayer, was issued by Moffat & Co. yesterday. About three hundred of these pieces have been struck off. The larger ones, of one and two hundred dollars, will be of the same stamp and size, differing only in thickness. Those over two hundred dollars will contain the same stamp, but will be

struck in the form of bars. These coins are, of course, a legal tender and are the coins of the United States to all intents and purposes. The coin is peculiar, containing only one face, an eagle in the center, around which are the words, 'United States of America.' Just over the eagle is stamped, '887 Thous.' signifying the fineness of the gold. At the bottom is stamped '50 Dolls.' The other face is ornamented with a kind of work technically called engine-turning, being a number of radii extending from a common centre, in which is stamped, in small figures, '50.' Around the edge is stamped the name of the United States Assayer. We trust our readers may learn the character of this new coin by ocular demonstration."

Altho bankers had agreed to accept fifty dollar ingots on deposit at their face value and no objection was raised by Custom House officials in regard acceptance of such coin in the payment of merchandise and duties, it is, nevertheless, a fact that there still existed much controversy relative to the status of the fifty dollar gold piece. Eminent attorneys and public officials had given their unqualified opinion that these coins were legal tender; that they bore the stamp of the Government, and like other U. S. coinage, were really issued by an Act of Congress. When certain Federal officials had refused to accept these coins, however, George N. Eckert, director of the mint was appealed to for a ruling on the matter. He stated that the coins of Moffat & Co. and all other private issues of gold were utterly unrecognized, and that the United States was under no obligation to accept them. True enough, he stated that Augustus Humbert had been sent to California, authorized to stamp bars of gold for the owners of this metal, but this fact did not make such pieces legal tender.

In July 1851, a bill was introduced in Congress which provided that coins of the United States Assay Office be made legal tender and that the institution be enlarged and be put on a mint basis. While this bill was rejected at the time, it is true however, that the United States Assay Office did prove to be a valuable institution. Through its establishment a more accurate means of estimating the value of gold dust was obtained, the price gradually increasing until it sold for as high as \$18.00 per ounce. With the Assay Office in full operation, more and more of the other private issues, especially the discredited ones, were driven out of circulation, creating, of course, an extreme shortage of the needed smaller denominations.

For reasons unknown, the Treasury Department did not approve the coinage of pieces of less than fifty dollar denomination by the Assay Office. In reply to a request by Moffat & Co. of April 14th, 1851 for permission to issue smaller denominations this letter was received by them from Acting Secretary Hodge:

Treasury Department, July 9th, 1851

Gentlemen: In reference to the suggestion made in your letter of the 14th of April, giving the results of the assaying and stamping of gold ingots during the month of March, that authority should be given to assay and stamp ingots of denominations and values under fifty dollars, I have to state that it is not deemed expedient at this time to authorize the assay and stamping of less denomination or value than fifty dollars.

Very respectfully, your ob't servant,
Wm. L. Hodge,
Acting Secretary of Treasury.

During the latter part of 1851 these fifty dollar pieces were about the only gold coins remaining in circulation as whatever U. S. coins of the regular issue that could be obtained were carefully hoarded for the payment of customs duties for which most of the private issues were not accepted. The fifty dollar coins became most inconvenient and a nuisance since the time had come when most tradespeople found it necessary to even charge a three per cent discount for exchanging one. The predominance of these coins and the scarcity of smaller denominations caused enough annoyance for one newspaper critic to refer to them as little less troublesome than the plagues of Egypt. In fact, press commentators throughout the state of California were most bitter against the monetary situation as it then existed, which again revived the agitation for the establishment of a branch mint in California.

Complaints against the U. S. Assay Office continued to reach the Treasury Department in Washington but strange to say, very little action was taken. People were insisting on the establishment of a branch mint and wanted no more half way measures, for they began to realize that, being part of the United States, not only was it expedient to have a monetary system that would be uniform with that of other sections of the nation, but that they were entitled to much more attention in the matter than they had been receiving. As monthly reports were sent into the Treasury Department, Moffat & Co. with each report in-

variably called attention to the necessity of five, ten and twenty dollar gold pieces, until at last, it appeared that authority had been granted. In a letter dated December 9, 1851, addressed to Joseph R. Curtis, a member of the firm of Moffat & Co., he was advised that Augustus Humbert had been authorized to stamp pieces of the denomination and value of twenty and ten dollars. On the following day, December 10, 1851, he was advised that the order had been revoked due to the fact that another bill had been introduced into Congress, relative to the establishment of a mint in San Francisco and to suspend, for the time, any authority given in the letter of December 9th.

It appears however, that the need of smaller denominations as a circulating medium became more imperative than ever before, inasmuch, as it was estimated that not more than \$200,000.00 worth of the smaller coins remained in circulation in the city of San Francisco. The firm of Moffat & Co. was the recipient of many petitions presented by influential citizens, whose chief request was for another issue of private coinage of five, ten and twenty dollars. As an emergency measure, it was suggested that \$300,000.00 worth of these coins be issued. Naturally, the firm of Moffat & Co. was somewhat reluctant to encourage the issue, for being under contract to the U. S. Government, the officials of this firm probably deemed it unethical to issue another series upon their own responsibility. As additional pressure was brought to bear by leading banking houses and the more prominent merchants and as another firm, Wass, Moliter & Co. had already begun the issue of \$5.00 gold pieces, the firm of Moffat & Co. finally consented to the issue.

The coinage of these pieces began about the latter part of January 1852, and one newspaper described the new ten dollar piece as follows: "The eagle which graces the reverse side of the coin is from the same nest as the ingots — a younger child of the same family. In a semi-circle you read, 264 Grs. California Gold. 880 Thous. Ten D." About one month after this issue began, Moffat & Co. took great pleasure in announcing that they had received permission from the Treasury Department to issue ingots of the denomination of ten and twenty dollars from the United States Assay Office. They stated that no more coins bearing the stamp of "Moffat & Co." would be manufactured, but that all such coins in circulation would be redeemed upon demand.

The new issues began on February 28th, 1852, and the design of the two denominations were very similar. The obverse of these coins bore an "engine turned" design with a band across the centre

bearing the inscription, "Augustus Humbert, United States Assayer of Gold, California 1852." The reverse had an eagle similar to the fifty dollar slug; over it, a scroll indicating in thousandths, the fineness of metal—"884 Thos." and under the eagle, "Ten Dols." with the legend "United States of America." The weight of the ten dollar coin was 262.7 grains while that of the twenty dollar denomination was 525.4 grains. It was during this same month that the firm of Moffat & Co. was dissolved and a new co-partnership established under the name of Curtis, Perry & Ward. In making a public announcement to this effect, it was stated that the "Contract for Smelting and Assaying Gold in California, authorized by Act of Congress," held by the late firm of Moffat & Co. had been transferred to them by the Treasury Department. It was also stated that authority had been given to issue coins of ten, twenty and fifty dollar denominations and also bars of five hundred and one thousand dollars.

During the latter part of 1852 more embarrassment ensued due to the fact that the issues of the U. S. Assay Office were refused at the Custom Office. Inasmuch as these coins represented most of California's circulating medium, it is easy to understand why a condition of chaos and a general feeling of resentment again asserted itself. While it might appear that there was probably a lack of harmony between the U. S. Assay Office and the U. S. Mint, it is, nevertheless, true that the coins of the Assay Office did not exactly conform to the regular issues. While the actual value of these coins was equivalent and in some instances, even greater than the regular U. S. coins, it was pointed out that the gold, in quality, did not represent the same fineness. It was for that reason that subsequent issues of the Assay Office were stamped "900 Thous." to conform with the regular coinage.

The people of California, however, having experienced one obstacle after another, still insisted, through their representatives in Congress, that a branch mint be established in their state. The request was finally granted and as a result coins of twenty dollar denomination bearing the National Design and "San Francisco Mint Mark" were first struck on April 15, 1854. The contract to furnish the building and machinery for the Branch Mint was undertaken by Messrs. Curtis and Perry of the Assay Office. While the United States Assay Office had proven itself a very useful establishment during a period in California's history which was most important, it nevertheless, was intended as a temporary institution, and as such, inevitably, became

obsolete as time and progress made it no longer a necessity in the affairs of the state. The transactions of this private mint will never be forgotten however, as it is likely that generations of numismatists to come will cherish the unusual issues created there.

Altho it quite obvious that the issues of Moffat & Co. and the U. S. Assay Office constitute a more important phase of California Gold coinage, it nevertheless, is true that several other concerns did contribute toward this series. Strange to state that altho Templeton Reid was one of the very first to issue a private gold coin in the United States, practically nothing is known of his activities in California. It has been stated that with the discovery of gold in 1849, that Reid moved all his machinery from Georgia to California and began minting operations in the latter state. The two known specimens of the ten and twenty-five dollar coins which came to the United States Mint collection at Philadelphia in 1849 are the only proof that Reid actually did strike coins in California. Today, the twenty-five dollar piece, or "half slug" is no longer on exhibition, as it was stolen from the mint cabinet several years ago.

In regard to the Massachusetts & California Company, it is apparent that the issues of this concern were struck in the east. This appears evident from the fact that coins produced by this company were heavily alloyed with copper in contrast to other California issues in which the natural alloy of silver was allowed to remain in the metal. The scarcity of these coins would indicate that the few known specimens are really pattern pieces only. The firm of Shultz & Co. was composed of Judge G. W. Shultz and William Thompson Garratt, owner of a brass foundry. For a time, this concern manufactured dies for other private coiners, but due to a scarcity of coin, also went into the coining business and struck issues of five dollar denomination. Later this firm coined private issues for Burgoyne & Co. and also, Argienti and Co., brokers.

The firm of Baldwin & Co. which has already been mentioned, consisted of George C. Baldwin and Thomas S. Holman, a San Francisco jeweler. It was in the month of April, 1850, that they purchased the coining machinery of F. D. Kohler & Co., and with the exception of the U. S. Assay Office, probably coined more money in 1850 and 1851 than any other private concern. However, when coins of Baldwin & Co. were submitted to Augustus Humbert for a true assay, they were apparently so much below par that even citizens of San

Francisco resolved not to accept them, and as a result, the company was forced to retire from business.

Gold coins of five dollar denomination were also issued by Dunbar & Co. of San Francisco and as these made their appearance soon after Baldwin & Co. went out of business, it has been assumed that the machinery for coining these was purchased by Edward E. Dunbar, a banker, from the Baldwin & Co. Not very many coins were struck by this concern however, as it seems that Mr. Dunbar came east a short time later to organize the well known Continental Bank Note Company. Another firm doing business at approximately this same time, was Wass, Molliter & Co., the concern being composed of Count S. C. Wass and A. P. Molliter. They first began coining five dollar gold pieces about January 1852, and sometime later struck pieces of ten, twenty and fifty dollar denomination. These issues were all of a very high standard and enjoyed the public confidence. A statement in "Alta California" of May 16, 1855, that this mint was about to strike twenty and fifty dollar pieces at the rate of \$38,000.00 per day, would indicate that Wass, Molliter & Co. did a very extensive business. The twenty dollar denomination is the rarest coin of this series.

Among the pioneers who came to California in 1849, was John Glover Kellogg, of Auburn, N. Y. He obtained employment with Moffatt & Co. and remained with this concern until it ceased operation as the U. S. Assay Office in December 1853. It was at this time that he, in company with G. F. Richter, an assayer of the U. S. Assay Office began a new smelting and assaying business under the firm name of Kellogg & Richter. Due to the fact that they began their business at a time when there was a great scarcity of coin, due to the reason that the U. S. Assay Office had ceased business and no private mint was functioning just then, they were petitioned by prominent citizens to strike a new issue. Even though the branch mint had begun to operate, but very few coins were struck due to the scarcity of other metals necessary for alloying and refining, so, for the time at least, most of the coinage was done by Kellogg & Richter. In the latter part of 1854, this firm dissolved partnership and was re-organized as Kellogg & Humbert. This arrangement lasted until 1860, although no more coins were struck after 1855. Kellogg coins were in denominations of twenty and fifty dollars, the former being quite common today, but the latter is excessively rare, inasmuch as there are only about a dozen known specimens.

Among other private coiners of California, we find the firm name of Dubosq & Co. Mr. Theodore Dubosq was a Philadelphia jeweler who came to California in 1849, but did not issue coins until 1850. He brought his machinery from the east and engraved his own dies, with which he struck pieces of five and ten dollar denominations. These coins were of good quality and were held at par by mint assayers at Philadelphia. Another firm was that of Ormsby & Co., composed of Dr. J. S. and Major William Ormsby, who struck coins of five and ten dollar denomination also. The ten dollar piece shows thirty-one stars around the border on the reverse side of the coin, indicative of the fact that California was the thirty-first state to be admitted to the Union. The five dollar piece, of which there is only one known specimen, is unique, inasmuch as it has only twenty stars, due the fact that the limited space would permit no more to be added.

In regard to the Cincinnati Mining & Trading Co., very little is known, as it appears that this was a mining company only. The few known specimens of coins struck by this concern are probably patterns and would indicate that minting operations had been contemplated, then abandoned. The Miners' Bank issues were struck by a banking firm consisting of Stephen A. Wright, John Thompson, Samuel W. Haight and J. C. L. Wadsworth. As already stated, these issues were much below par and failed to weather the storm. The last important issues of private gold in the United States made their appearance in Colorado in 1860 and 1861. Among these were the beautiful Pikes Peak coins of Clark, Gruber & Co., the J. J. Conway pieces and the issues of John Parson & Co.

While I have, practically, mentioned all known concerns, who, at one time or another, were engaged in the manufacture of private gold coin in the United States, I should like to relate in a few words something regarding the unknown coiners of private issues in this country. I refer of course, to those individuals or firms responsible for the minor gold coins of California, such as the dollar, half dollar and the quarter dollar. I have about one hundred varieties of these interesting little pieces in my collection, nevertheless, I am unable to identify the source of a single specimen. Mr. Edward M. Lee in his wonderful book on these issues, is able to list, approximately, 425 varieties, but makes the statement that so far as can be ascertained, the names of the persons or firms responsible for the smaller coins are unknown. He states that from the designs and quality of certain varieties, it is thought that many of them were issued by firms coining the larger

denominations while others were struck by responsible jewelers and merchants. On account of this lack of identification, it is, in my opinion, that these pieces were imitated a great deal, some of these imitations being deliberate counterfeits while others were struck merely as souvenirs, ornaments or bangles. Most of these were made of brass and gold plated, while others were manufactured from a good grade of gold metal. One way of determining whether or not the specimen in your possession is genuine California coinage is to make sure that the denomination is inscribed on the coin. The numeral 1, or the fractions $1/2$ and $1/4$ will not suffice unless accompanied by the word Dollar or its abbreviation, Dol. On some of the genuine specimens the word Cents or Token is also used.

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In concluding my subject, I sincerely hope that I have not only made clear the monetary situation of the pioneer days, but that I have been successful in imparting to the reader a satisfactory description of private gold coinage.



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